

17 01 29 Romans 9:14 The Justice of God – 1

Question: Do you believe that God is just? The great need today is for ordinary Christian to share the message of God's love with a hurting world. But it is hard because, if we do, it won't be long before we meet an objection, and we feel inadequate to give a satisfactory answer. The fact is that no-one has all the answers, but the accusation that God can't be just because He seems to choose some and not others is a hard one.

In Romans 9 Paul has been talking about God's purposes of election in choosing Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau, a remnant of Israel and not the whole nation. But that doesn't sound like God is being fair, and Paul is well aware of this false conclusion,

Romans 9:14 *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on Gods part? By no means!*

At the prayer meeting Sue shared how this week she was able to encourage someone in her faith, "It doesn't depend on you. You have not chosen Him, but he has chosen you for a purpose." This was a great encouragement to Sue's friend, and it should be to us also. But is it fair?

1. Scriptural background

We sing a song, **ASCRIIBE GREATNESS** to our God, the Rock, His work is perfect and all His ways are just. This song is based on the second song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. It comes after the Exodus, after 40 years of wandering in the desert due to their unbelief, and just before the new generation entered the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 32:1-4).

The teaching (Deuteronomy 32:2) is the good teaching of the word of God that feeds and nourishes the human soul. Moses then says that he will *proclaim the Name of the Lord* (Deuteronomy 32:3). This is the Name revealed to Moses and the children of Israel, I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14). Moses reminded the people that God's work is perfect and all His ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4).

This understanding of God didn't come out of academia nor was it the product of the best human minds. It came from a people called and chosen by God. These words in Deuteronomy 32 came from the mouth of a humble (rather humbled!) shepherd who encountered the God of Creation in a burning bush in the middle of no-where. It came from the experience of a people who had known the power and tender mercies of God in deliverance from slavery, but also the discipline of the Lord because God is just and He doesn't overlook or ignore or bypass human sin and rebellion. They suffered the 40 years of wilderness because they were *a crooked and twisted generation*. Instead of trusting God, they blamed Him for all their problems!

In Paul's day, people challenged the justice of God, especially gentiles who were coming to faith from a pagan background. In our day people challenge the justice of God. Moses needed to remind the new generation of the justice of God before they entered the Land. We need to be reminded of God's justice. The problem is not with God, but with sinful human beings (Romans 3:23) who are crooked and twisted. Sin plays tricks with our minds (Isaiah 5:20, Romans 1:23). We make out ourselves to be good, even perfect, and make out God to be evil!

2. Christian background

Is there injustice on God's part because, so it seems from Romans 9, that God interferes in some way with the human will, in choosing some and hardening others?

This dilemma between the sovereignty of God and human free will has long been recognised in Christianity. The Reformed Baptist Pastor John Piper says, *If this stretches your mind to breaking point, better that our mind be broken than the Scriptures be broken.*

Those who emphasis the sovereignty of God over free will have often called themselves Calvinists, after the Reformer John Calvin. Those who have emphasised free will over God's sovereignty have tended to call themselves Arminian, after the Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius. Both positions can be made from Scripture!

However I think an analogy to understand free will and God's sovereignty is to see God as a good parent. A good parent allows their children freedom, and wants them to learn to make good choices. But a good parent also imposes boundaries, and may override the child's free will and impose discipline if the child continually crosses those boundaries. The child might throw a tantrum, and say, "That's not fair!" But in fact the parent is acting responsibly. Also, good parents make a lot of choices for their children that children are not equipped to make, often for the child's safety.

Nevertheless there are some things we are never going to understand about God (Isaiah 55:8-9). He is God! At the end of this section (Romans 9-11) Paul calls God's ways *inscrutable* (Romans 11:33). This means 'hard to make out' or 'unfathomable.' Our problem is that we think that we have to know someone or something before we can commit. But faith is a call to commitment on the basis of trustworthiness of God, not on the basis of trying to work everything out first. When I came to GBC I committed myself on the basis of trust, not on the basis of knowing everything about you!

3. Cultural background

There is within every soul the impulse for justice. This is especially evident in Western democracies where justice and equality and among the most important values. Great social movements were and are motivated by a desire for justice, such as Fairtrade, the Civil Rights movement, the Jubilee campaign, pro-Life and hundreds of others.

Most people recognise there is injustice in our broken world. And most people have a sense that things should be different, and that an ideal world should be one of justice and equity.

So when we come to the Bible and read, *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills* (Romans 9:18), this is, in our society, like a red rag to a bull! However, the great irony is that the God of the Bible is the God who loves justice and equity (Psalm 9:-8). In fact we could say that the human longing for justice is a reflection of our Creator who has made us in His own image. So we have to read Romans 9 very carefully, to see what it is saying, and to see what it is not saying.

Conclusion

Romans 9:15 *For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy."*

There is more to say about this verse, but we should note that the emphasis here is not on God showing mercy to one person and not to the next, randomly. The emphasis is on the mercy of God. The quote is from Exodus 33, where God reveals himself as a God of mercy. God is not only just, God is more than just: He is merciful. If God were only just we would all stand condemned before Him, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

God is more than just, and so loved the world that He sent his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.